

can **YOU**
match their
LOVE?

BY A
SISTER
OF
SAINT MARY



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THEIR LOVE?

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*I sing of love and sacrifice. Of love
That burns to light and warm, not to
destroy;
Of sacrifice which, offered to the Lord,
Is reason for our joy, cause of new hope.
I sing of women free, yet tightly bound;
Free from the chains of sin, from satan's
thrall;
Bound by the triple cord of gracious vows.
Where is a love that dares to vault as theirs
Into the open, outstretched arms of God?
Where is a love that bends to humble tasks
With sweeter relish and more constant
proofs?
I sing of Everynun.
Who long before you rise has prayed for
you;
And when night drops the dusky purple
drape
Over the sins of men, she drops her prayers
To cover human sinning and to gain*

*Mercy they do not ask, pardon they fail to earn.*¹

We sing of martyrs of charity. Who can count their number? That vast army of picked troops who march through the pages of time unnoticed and unsung. Their names will not be found in the martyrology of the Church, yet they are martyrs in the true sense of the word. Their names will be found only in the heart of God for whom they gave their lives in service to His poor and needy.

“Lord, when did we see You hungry and fed You; thirsty, and gave You to drink? And when did we see You a stranger and took You in; or naked and clothed You? Or when did we see You sick or in prison and come to You?”

“Amen, amen, I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren you did it for Me.”

Yes, from all walks of life they come; these heroes and heroines of God, and we would like to eulogize them all but since they have already been “toasted” by the citizens

¹ Father Daniel Lord, S.J. Everynrun, a modern morality play.

of heaven and by the Almighty, Himself, and because we are incompetent to undertake such a tremendous task, we will confine these pages to the martyrs of charity of the Sisters of Saint Mary. Of you, our sisters, our companions, our inspiration, our martyrs, our saints . . . we sing!

Yellow Fever Plague — 1878
Memphis, Tenn.

“What’s this?” shouted the trembling Memphis business man as he hastily scanned the morning paper on that fateful July 26, 1878. Reading aloud half to himself he continued, “Yellow fever has made its appearance in New Orleans, Louisiana, and threatens to become epidemic.” The perspiration that stood out on his furrowed brow was not the result of the summer heat alone but of the fear which gripped his heart as he recalled the scourge of previous years. Nor was he alone in his misgivings. All Memphis was in a state of panic as the citizens, reliving the plague of 1873 in which 2,000 lives were lost, fled from the city.

Yes, he was rampant again, the monster whom everyone feared. By August 14, as there were 3,000 cases of yellow fever reported, an urgent request was sent out by the Howard Association for physicians, nurses, food, clothing and supplies.

Mother Odilia received the request as the voice of God calling upon her to make another sacrifice for His love. This was enough for her. A less generous soul would, after surveying the work already on hand and the meager resources at her disposal, have arrived at the practical conclusion that it was

impossible for her to come to the assistance of this cause, worthy though it be. But love is not practical and (we say it with reverence) neither was our Mother Odilia when it was a question of service to God's poor. Love is very impractical; it is oftentimes foolish.

It must be remembered that the community over which Mother Odilia presided was in its infancy, less than six years old. Already it was engaged in a number of minor charities and three major ones which more than overburdened its meager funds and thirty-one sisters. Mother did not stop to lament the fact that the sisters at St. Mary's convent were living in conditions that bordered on frugality; that the Sisters at St. Joseph's orphan home weren't half enough to care for the numerous tasks involved in this institution, nor that the newly opened St. Mary's Infirmary would, in a very short time, require additional sister-nurses. She followed only one line of thought. God had asked for help; He should have it. So that evening after supper she asked, "Would any of the sisters volunteer to nurse the yellow fever victims in the South?"

Mother's confidence had not been misplaced, for many were the generous hearts

that offered their services and if necessary their lives.

"I think five will be sufficient for the present," Mother remarked as she considered and prayed in her heart for guidance in making the proper choice.

The Choice of His Love

Sisters Wilhelmine, Stanislaus, Vincent, Gertrude and Margaret Mary with all their youth and vigor could not contain their excitement. They were the chosen ones!

How does the girl feel who is chosen from all her classmates, from among all the friends she lived and worked with to be the bride of Christ? And how does that bride of Christ feel when she is chosen by her Lover Himself from among all His other spouses as His favorite, the one chosen to perform some heroic, and (since He is the crucified Lover) usually painful and difficult task? Do you really want to know? Ask the generous soul; ask the spouse who gives unto folly for only she will be able to tell you.

"Maybe you will see your father when you arrive in Memphis," Mother hopefully reminded Sister Vincent, a former resident of that town.

"That would really be wonderful. I haven't seen mother or dad since I entered and that's three years ago," Sister concluded with all the dignified maturity of twenty-one years.

The hot, sultry morning of August 30 found the entire little community overflowing from the lawn into the street for the farewells. There were no weeping eyes but there were many weeping hearts among those left behind for well they knew the peril upon which their companions were entering. Mother Odilia, bravely hiding her sorrow beneath a smile, spoke cheerfully, reminding them that they would be daily in her heart and in her prayers.

"Better get started or we'll miss the train," a voice boomed from a waiting carriage. It was Doctor P. C. Nugent, who had also volunteered his services. Man-like he was growing impatient of the prolonged farewells which are part of a woman's makeup. Mother hastily went to the carriage.

"So nice of you to accompany the Sisters, Doctor. They are in good hands, I know. We will be praying for you."

As Mother spoke, the young nuns, tripping over their skirts, were climbing into the high carriage. "Goodbye and God bless you!"



"FOR FOUR OF
THESE THERE
WOULD BE NO
RETURNING."

echoed and re-echoed as the horses pranced down the narrow street. For four of these five generous women, there would be no returning. They would never, in this world, see their dear spiritual mother or companions again. But even if they had known this, they would not have been less enthusiastic, for such is the language of love.

“With Desolation Is the Whole Land Made Desolate.”

How truly could these biblical words be applied to the unfortunate city of Memphis, the city which the Sisters of Saint Mary entered that first day of September. You might walk for miles without seeing a living human being. The only living creatures seemed to be the undertakers, and the only moving things were the carriages carrying the dead to the cemeteries. The cries of bereaved mothers, wives, sisters and brothers were heard on all sides. The pitiful wail of the animals left behind by their former owners added a further dismal note to the dirge played by “Yellow Jack.” The streets were obscured by the smoke of ignited tar and bedsteads; ticks and blankets could be seen burning at almost every street corner.

This was the land into which God had called these sisters from their peaceful, prayerful convent home in St. Louis. Did they doubt His love, when on arriving, they beheld all this? Did Mary doubt His love when she was commanded to leave her peaceful home in Bethlehem and flee with the Child into the land of Egypt filled with superstitions and paganism? We know she went joyfully, knowing that as she carried the Christ with her He would dispel the paganism as He went. So too, the Sisters of St. Mary, far from doubting His love rejoiced that they might bring the God whom they carried in their hearts to these stricken people since at the outset they realized how little they could do for them materially.

After leaving Doctor Nugent at the station, the five sisters boarded the almost empty street car which took them to the La Salette Academy on Third Street. As the conveyance crawled along the tracks with a speed that suggested that it too had become infected with the malady of the town, Sister Vincent caught sight of her father, Mr. Hickey.

“Daddy! Daddy!” she shouted; but the creaking wheels of the car as they begged for a little lubrication, drowned out her voice.

But she had seen him and for that she was grateful. When he found out where she was working he would come to see her. Of that she was sure.

The Dominican Sisters welcomed them heartily, for many of their members as well as a number of the students were ill.

"Oh, it's a Godsend to have you," Sister Dominic sighed as she met them at the door. "Come into the kitchen. We have just finished our supper and the food only needs a little reheating. You must all be very tired and hungry."

Gladly the sisters followed her into the spacious kitchen of the boarding school. They could not deny the pangs of hunger which persisted even after the last fragment of the shoebox lunch had been consumed on the train.

"There is so much to be done," Sister was saying as she heaped the dinner plates with beef and dumplings. "Some of you can stay upstairs with the girls and . . . oh, excuse me, someone is at the front door."

"Are the Sisters, the Franciscan Sisters of St. Louis here?" The deep bass voice resounded even to the kitchen, and Sister Vin-

cent almost dropped her cup thinking for a minute it was her father.

“Yes, Father Aloysius, they have just arrived and are eating their supper; then I think we should let them have a good rest and maybe. . . .”

“Oh, Sister, have a heart. You have no idea of the condition the monastery is in. I’m the only well member there. Of course, many of your sisters are ill too, but somehow women can get along. But you should just see our house.” Then as an afterthought, “How many Sisters of Saint Mary are here?”

“Five, Father.”

“Five? Well, that’s more than enough. Just let me take two of them with me, and you can have the other three.”

Sister Dominic knew she would have to let some of them go sooner or later, so with a sigh of resignation she replied, “Please sit down, Father. They will be a while yet. They have only begun their meal.”

As if they hadn’t heard the entire conversation, Sister told them of the priest’s plea as she sliced the juicy apple pie, remarking as she did so, “Eat your fill, sisters. It will be very hard to buy food now that the fever

is raging. These provisions we had in storage."

After they had helped with the dishes, all the sisters greeted Father Aloysius Wiewer, O.F.M., in the parlor. It was decided that Sisters Wilhelmine and Margaret Mary would go with him. As they climbed into his waiting buggy, Father declared, "Sisters, you'll never know how much it means to us to have you here." Even Lightning, the horse, seems glad, Father reflected as he watched the animal trot at an unusual pace (for him, at least) down the alley and across the town.

Just as Father had predicted, the monastery was in great disorder. With experienced eyes the sisters looked the situation over.

"I'll take care of the kitchen, the door and the sick secular priests, if you will stay upstairs with the sick Franciscan Fathers and Brothers," Sister Wilhelmine decided.

"Very well," Sister Margaret Mary agreed, quickly fastening the bib of the heavy dark apron, "but if you need help, just call me."

Receive This Immaculate Host!

"What this place needs is a good house-cleaning," Sister Wilhelmine said to the broom as she placed it behind the door,



"RECEIVE THIS IMMACULATE HOST..."

"but that will just have to wait until I take care of the priests, they come first . . . later on . . . yes, sister, I'll make some right away," she called back to Sister Margaret Mary.

The little hand beater whirred and hummed as Sister beat the eggs to a foam, adding sugar, milk and vanilla. Just a few more eggs left and no more to be had from now on. Two large glasses of eggnog she carried up to Sister Margaret Mary's patients. Brother Hesse and Brother Erasmus were too ill to take any nourishment. The remainder of the delicious eggnog she served to her priest patients. How they enjoyed it!

"You know, Sister," spoke up Father Henry, gratitude shining in his sunken eyes, "before you came I waited seven hours for a drink of water . . . just no one around, you understand."

Yes, she understood and she was so happy to be able to help in what little way she could. But there was really so little one could do, Sister reflected as she held the glass of cold water to the trembling lips of the priest. Almost immediately he began vomiting. So little one could do! But she could pray; and taking out her rosary beads, she knelt by the



"BEFORE YOU CAME I
WAITED SEVEN HOURS
FOR A DRINK..."

bed of the dying priest interspersing her *Aves* with "Mary, Queen of the Clergy, have pity on your priests."

"Father Aloysius," Sister Wilhelmine called as she caught sight of him in the hall, "could you stay here just long enough so I could go down to the basement and wash some of these clothes? There isn't a clean piece of linen in the closet."

"Yes, of course, Sister. But let me help you carry that heavy basket. Just a minute now!" Father, turning around, realized that he had been talking to himself for Sister's sturdy arm had encircled the basket and she was gone from the room. Why, she hadn't even thought of the weight of the basket! Who, but the hireling counts the cost!

Standing beside the iron sink, up to her elbows in soapsuds, Sister surveyed the lines filled with waving blankets and towels whipped by the late morning breeze. Then tired, hungry and wet with perspiration, she hurried upstairs. Just as she had expected, Father Aloysius had been called away, and as she made her appearance in the doorway, three of the sick priests were calling to her at once.

"Orange juice?" Oh dear, if only she could

find an orange or two for these poor sufferers.

"A blanket? Yes, right away." As Sister watched the violent chill shake the thin form, she knew that death was not far off for the young father. The corpses of Father Maternus and Brother Amandus were still waiting to be taken from the house. The sisters had done all they could to save their lives but God had other plans for them.

Along about midnight on September fifth, Sister Wilhelmine tiptoed to the floor above, where Sister Margaret Mary sat by the bed of one of the brothers saying her rosary.

"Sister, would you mind if I lie down for just an hour or so. My head is spinning, and I think just a little rest would help so much."

"Not at all, Sister. You do not need to rise until morning; you've been going night and day for five days now."

"But I can't burden you with all. . . ."

"If I need you before morning, I'll call you," promised Sister Margaret Mary.

"God bless you, you are so kind," Sister Wilhelmine called back, as holding to the walls and furniture, with unsteady gait, she made her way to the room they shared together. Fully clothed, she lay down upon the

bed, the bed from which she was never to rise. Next morning, entering the little bedroom, Sister Margaret Mary called, "Praised and blessed be the divine heart of Jesus. Did you have a good sleep, Sister?"

There was no reply from the unconscious form on the bed. And, feeling her hot cheeks, Sister knew the answer. Gently she removed the Holy Habit and putting on her a nightgown, the last one in the trunk, tucked her under the covers. She must call the doctor right away. But even while doing so, she realized the futility of this gesture. Sister Wilhelmine had been right yesterday when she remarked, "I'm burning up." It was not the heat of the September sun but the scorching breath of the yellow fever monster that had made her so uncomfortable. She was the first Sister of Saint Mary he had caught up with but he had others on his list.

In her delirium, Sister was doing all the things she planned yesterday; making egg-nogs for the priests, buying oranges, washing clothes. In lucid intervals, she murmured her willing acceptance of death and repeated many ejaculations. After five days of agony, lifting the host of her young life (for she was only 22 years of age) as the priest at the

altar, she offered it to the eternal Priest who tenderly received it from her hands.

The Sacrificial Lamb

Sister Vincent was the first to volunteer to go South when Mother Odilia made the request for help. Not only was her generous heart eager to bring relief to the suffering victims of the plague but she had another motive. She wanted to offer herself as a sacrifice for the conversion of her father who had fallen away from the faith.

At the Dominican convent where she and the two other Sisters of St. Mary were nursing, she was startled by an impatient pounding on the door the morning after their arrival.

"Sister, we need someone to nurse at the Simms' home," the gentleman said breathlessly, almost before the door was opened.

"But sir, there are only three of us here and . . ."

"Do you realize that Mr. Simms is a member of the Howard Association and his wife and children are in the throes of the fever," protested the large figure on the porch.

“Just a minute, sir; you wait right here,” Sister replied.

Passing through the convent chapel on her way to relay the message to the sisters, she knelt for a brief moment very close to Him. What did she say? Secrets are meant for only two but we may conjecture; for not more than five minutes later, with a swiftness born of love, she joined the man on the porch and together they went to the Simms home.

Putting on the heavy, blue apron, Sister rolled up her sleeves and worked like a veteran. She was so happy! There was no shortage of supplies in the home of these wealthy people and Sister outdid herself in providing comfort for her patients. From one to another she went, bathing, changing bed linens, serving tasty broths.

“Every day I bless God for sending you to us,” remarked the grateful Mr. Simms as he watched his beloved wife convalesce.

So indefatigably did the little sister care for her charges that they were all well on the way to recovery that evening of September sixth when she retired early, the first time she had been to bed at all in four days.

When she did not come downstairs next

morning, Mrs. Simms went to her room and seeing her condition forbade her to rise.

“Go immediately, Josh,” she called to the yardman, “go to the Dominican convent and ask one of the sisters to come to care for this child; she is too ill to be moved. And bring Doctor Zede back with you. Oh, dear, if anything happens to this dear child, I could never forget it. Here I am so well now and she . . .”

It was Sister Armella who came to care for Sister Vincent. She was one of the three Sisters Mother had sent on September eighth at the request of Sister Margaret Mary. Every comfort and convenience that the family could afford was at her disposal. On their knees, the family of Mr. Simms begged God to spare the life of the Sister who had nursed them back to health.

“Was God deaf to their prayers?” they wondered as the days dragged by and there was no improvement. No, God is never deaf to prayer, but His ears are ever attuned to the most unselfish prayer. He, “Love’s Victim true,” is ever searching for victims and His kind Heart cannot refuse to accept one especially if the victim is also the priest as was our little Sister.

Sister Armella's strong arms cradled the head of the young nun.

"Here," she encouraged, "you must try to drink a little broth, you haven't taken anything today."

There was no protestation from the patient although she felt the waves of nausea sweep over her at the very mention of food or drink.

"Oh, you poor dear," sympathized the older nun as she caught the black vomitus in the basin. "No, we better not try anymore right now."

As all victims of a fever, Sister Vincent spent much time in that weird, delirious state which, while frightening to the spectator, is often a merciful relief for the sufferer.

"Oh, Mary, I love you I give you my heart," her clear voice would ring through the house with an unnatural vehemence born of her oblivion of her surroundings. Over and over again she prayed for her father. Suddenly coming out of her delirium she whispered, "Oh, if only I could see my father again! But maybe . . ." After several minutes of silence she again spoke. "Please tell Mother Odilia to take good care of my little

sister and ask her to take the earrings from my trunk and give them to her."

"Her earrings!" She had only little things to offer. She had no big things left anymore, she had given them all to Him, even herself, the biggest gift of all.

A violent chill shook her now thin body and a faint smile played about the swollen lips and spread to the flushed cheeks as the Good Shepherd gathered the sacrificial lamb into His loving arms. It was September 11, at eleven o'clock in the morning.

Less than one hour later as Sister Armella transferred the corps from the bed to the floor, she was startled by voices at the front door.

"Is my daughter here? Some man down the street said she was nursing here and I must see her right away. Do you realize I haven't seen that child in three years?" Mr. Hickey finished all in one breath without giving the woman at the door a chance to speak. If he had given her a chance, would she have known what to say? There she stood, the lovely and now healthy Mrs. Simms, bent in grief. She was speechless. What could she say? In her heart she prayed, and then without a word pointed to the door

to the left of the entrance. In a flash, the man had passed by her and opened the door.

"My God!" screamed the frenzied and bewildered father as, falling on his knees besides the yellow corpse, he kissed her still warm cheeks.

"My God! She gave her life for me, she died that I might live—live in Your grace!" It was long that he knelt by her side; long after the convulsive sobbing that shook his lank frame had ceased. He knelt and prayed not for her but to her.

"Don't touch her," he shouted at Sister Armella. Then regaining control of himself, "Thank you for all you have done for her, but just leave her as she is now. I'll bring the casket myself and place her in it."

"The very best that you have," he demanded of the undertaker. And together with his wife they placed the body of their little Bridget in the coffin and accompanied it to the cemetery.

That very evening Mr. Hickey, with head bent in shame and contrition, made his peace with God. A few days later both he and his wife fell victims to the plague and joined their daughter whose love had purchased for them a kingdom.



"MY GOD! SHE GAVE HER LIFE FOR ME."

Reward Enough

Sister Stanislaus sat down at the bed of Mary Adler, a pupil at the Dominican convent where she had remained to nurse.

"While she's asleep, I'll write a few lines to Mother Odilia," Sister whispered to herself. The sickroom was stuffy with the pungent odor of disinfectants but Sister didn't notice it, so accustomed had she become in her short stay here to disagreeable odors.

Wiping the perspiration from her round face she began:

Dear Reverend Mother,

It is very hard for me to write a few lines to you with the thought of being so far from you and the dear Sisters and maybe die and never see you again. But I say with my Heavenly Bridegroom, "Father, not my will but Thine be done." Here we are, well in the evening and next morning if not dead, sick enough to die. Oh, it is so hard.

The Benedictine Sisters have to be taken care of by secular nurses because all are sick but one. The superior just died. I helped take care of her.

Mother, we still have good courage and I hope that dear Blessed Mother and the saints



THE SICKROOM WAS STUFFY
WITH PUNGENT ODORS."

will help us that we may get home well again. If not, I beg you, dear Reverend Mother, and all the sisters to pray fervently for all of us.

Greetings to all!

Sister Stanislaus.²

Mary stirred and resumed her almost ceaseless moaning. Quickly Sister was at her side. Then she checked all her other patients in the long hall. All were sick or dying; there were no well members anymore.

Oh yes, she must cook a little gruel for Sister Sarah; maybe she would be able to retain that. Surely this vomiting had to stop sometime!

"Sister, sister!" weakly called the aged nun.

Oh dear, she had put the convalescing Sister Lambert in a chair not more than five minutes ago and now she had fallen to the floor. "How shall I ever get her back in bed?" mused the little Sister as she ran to the side of the huge patient. For one brief moment she hesitated; then stooping down she lifted Sister Lambert onto the bed. She was almost proud of herself. She didn't know she was so strong and He would not spoil

² Original letter in file.

her joy. He would not remind her that it was really His work; that He had done the hard lifting, for is not that His Fatherly way? Had He not treated the Apostles in like manner when He appeared to them on the shore and told them to cast their nets on the other side for a draught? Then when they dragged their bursting nets ashore, proud of their catch, He said, "Bring some of the fishes which you have caught." As if to imply that the success was all theirs. Oh, good and gracious Jesus!

Running back to the kitchen, Sister Stanislaus found her precious cereal a charred mass.

"Well, I never expected to win any blue ribbons for my cooking," smiled the little nun as she scoured the pot and put fresh water on to boil, "but I didn't realize I was quite so bad."

"Where are they, ma'am?" a man's voice called from the doorway. It was the undertaker. He had come for the two Sisters and one girl who had expired during the night. Yes, she would be with him in a minute, she called over her shoulder.

Every day was the same; an endless round of work with seldom as much as two or three hours of sleep at night. Prayers? Yes, their

whole day was one continual prayer, the prayer of sacrifice and love.

Peeling the last of the potatoes that afternoon, Sister Stanislaus braced herself against the kitchen sink and confided to Sister Gertrude, "You know, I feel as if I were one hundred and two years old instead of twenty-two." And before nightfall, she too, was among the fever victims.

Next morning a happy surprise was in store for her. Father Aloysius, after administering the sacrament of Extreme Unction asked, "Sister would you like to pronounce your holy vows?"

The little sister sat straight up in bed. Had she heard him correctly or was it the fever? And then when Father repeated his question, sinking back on the hard pillow she sighed, "Oh, I'd love to!"

In short gasps she pronounced the formula after the priest. "I, Sister Stanislaus, vow to God, poverty, chastity and obedience . . ."

"Obedience unto death as His Son," the angels concluded as she lay panting while tears of joy streamed down her cheeks. Then turning to Father she smilingly said, "Reward enough, abundantly more than enough for all I have suffered or must still suffer."

Repeatedly she prayed, holding the rough wooden crucifix, not as she had requested in her recent letter to Mother Odilia that she might return home, but "Thy will be done." Now she had no longer any desire for what her youth still held out to her but like the faithful bride, she had eyes only for "Him whom her soul loveth."

Never has He been outdone by His creatures in love for He is the master of that art. So not being able to wait any longer, He came with the dusk of September 11 to claim His happy bride. "Reward enough, abundantly more than enough."

An Exchange of Crowns

Sadly Sister Gertrude returned from the funeral of her companion, Sister Stanislaus. She was not afraid of the added burden of extra work, for Mother Odilia had sent three more Sisters, one of whom was helping her at the convent; but in her heart she had to admit that she was lonely and homesick. For a brief half hour, which was as much as she could afford from her duties, Sister knelt close to Him in the tiny chapel. She did not feel she needed to pray for the souls of her companions who had given their lives for

their friends in Christ, but she was asking for strength for those who were still fighting, for herself and the newly arrived sisters.

"Dear me!" sighed the Dominican superior as Sister Gertrude entered the room. "How long is this epidemic going to last?"

"They say until the first frost, and that is a little way off yet."

"Yes, this is only September 12," the nun almost whispered in despair.

"How are the girls on the second floor?" Sister Gertrude asked, taking a pail of fresh water from the back and going toward the stairs.

"I'm sure they all could stand some attention. I've been spending most of the time while you were gone with our Sisters."

They were a strange sight, these teen-age girls, their flushed faces accentuating the whiteness of the painted iron beds that stood in evenly spaced rows. From one to another she went, lifting their heads and gently placing the cup to parched lips.

"Oh thank you, Sister!" grateful eyes beamed, as the fever made them strangely bright. It seemed so little she was doing for them, she reflected disheartedly. Just a cup of cold water! And for some, she could no

longer do even that. They were beyond her ministrations. But none of them were beyond her prayers, she triumphantly concluded as she repeated aloud, "My Jesus mercy! Sweet Heart of Jesus be my love! Jesus, I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee with all my heart! I am truly sorry for all my sins; come now to me spiritually."

And from a bed here and there where the yellow monster had not yet too firm a grip on his victim, young voices repeated the ejaculations.

"How is my mother, Sister?" Jane weakly called to the nun as she stopped to fluff her pillow.

"Your mother?" Sister hesitated. "We must pray for her," she evasively concluded, as she hurried to the other end of the hall. She could not, she would not tell the girl that her mother had died during the night for it was evident that Jane would follow her mother perhaps even today.

"Could you come down and help me in the North Hall a few minutes?" Sister Armella called from the floor below.

Together they turned the more helpless patients, making them as comfortable as possible. There was work enough here for a doz-

en people, but the two sisters uncomplainingly went from one task to another. Big souls never do anything in a little way because they do all with great love.

"We are out of water again," commented Sister Gertrude taking the two huge pails and walking down the gravel path to the pump. Maybe it was the late afternoon drizzle, and maybe it was the cold water she had accidentally spilled over her feet that made her shiver as she lugged the brimming pails back to the house. No time to take off her shoes and change stockings; already they were calling to her from upstairs.

That night long after her feet were dry she was still shivering but she would say nothing. A night's sleep would make her feel so much better, and fortunately this was her night to sleep.

Next morning, however, the chills had been replaced by a burning fever which made her insensible to her surroundings. When she did awaken, her first request was, "A little water, please." The echo of the crucified Christ on the cross. "I thirst." But like Him, she and so many other victims of the fever were unable to satiate the burning thirst which consumed them.

“Father is coming to administer to you the sacrament of Extreme Unction,” Sister Armella spoke kindly.

“And bring me Jesus in Holy Communion?”

“No Sister, he couldn’t risk that since you are vomiting so much, but just make a fervent spiritual communion in your heart.”

Although Sister could not receive the Eucharistic Christ, another joy awaited her. The privilege of pronouncing her holy vows. (All the Sisters of Saint Mary who died in the yellow fever plague made their holy vows on their death bed.)

And as the words “I vow to God Almighty,” fell haltingly from her lips, they became a refreshing draught which inundated her soul. What of the thirst now? She was glad to bear it. Small enough return for so great a grace. But then followed the days of agony.

“Oh my head! I think it will burst.” And then, “But He suffered so much more for me and I . . . I am so unworthy to wear the crown of thorns. That’s just what it feels like,” she would finish with a sigh, holding her head in both hands.

Her lips moved continually in fervent as-

pirations and then about noon on September 12 her crucified Love bending over her bed of death, gently removed the crown of thorns and replacing it with the crown of jewels which He carried near His Heart introduced her to the choir of virgins.

Sister Margaret Mary was now the only sister still living of the original five who left St. Louis on August 30. She writes to Mother Odilia at this time:

Dear Mother,

In the course of the last three days we have buried three of our dear Sisters. The corpse of Sister Gertrude is still in the house. What can we do but pray, "Lord may Thy will be done?"

Should it please the dear Lord that this may be the last letter I write you, or if we may not have the pleasure of meeting you again in this world, we bid adieu to you, dear Mother, and all our dear Sisters. We will pray for you in heaven.

In the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, we remain, in life and in death,

Your obedient children. ³

³ Original letter in file.

At the same time, Father Aloysius sent a telegram to Mother Odilia: "Send no more Sisters."

Quickly came Mother's consoling letter to her spiritual children.

My beloved children,

Embracing you in spirit, I send you a hearty "God reward you" for your dear letter to me. What a prodigy of wisdom and love of God it is that the Sacred Heart of Jesus has found and plucked such mature fruit in the garden of His faithful servants, as yet so small and young. Saints He has now in heaven who are our Guardian Angels, our intercessors. The Bridegroom called and they came forth. Painful beyond measure it is for us, but when beheld in the light of faith, what a grace! Therefore my dear children let us persevere in perfect resignation to the Holy Will of God.

If we can send you anything to alleviate and comfort you, telegraph at once. We shall do everything in our power to help you.

A thousand greetings from all your companion Sisters who are constantly praying and weeping for you as is also,



THE SACRED HEART
HAS FOUND AND PLUCKED
SUCH MATURE FRUIT

Your ever loving Mother in the Sacred
Heart of Jesus,

Mother Mary Odilia ⁴

Canton, Mississippi

When the second group of sisters left for Memphis, another group set out for Canton, Mississippi, where they arrived on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But the sights that met Sisters Rose, Petronilla, Francis, Josepha and Johana were not less nauseous than those encountered in Memphis.

"Let us assist at Holy Mass first," suggested Sister Rose as they stood on the platform of the deserted station. In vain the sisters looked about for someone who could tell them where the nearest church was. The town was lifeless.

"Why don't we just start down this street? There must be a church around here some place and if there is, we'll find it." And they did! But during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass several of the sisters were called to go to the various homes. There was no hesitation or reluctance in leaving. Well they un-

⁴ Original letter in file.

derstood the words of St. Teresa; "It is better to serve Christ than to receive Him."

When the Lamp of Love Burned Brightest

Sister Johana was called to Goffe's hotel. Mr. Goffe and his two children were very sick. It was hard work even for the sturdy Sister Johana because Mr. Goffe was a hulk of a man and there was so much to be done. Almost from the first Sister feared that he would not recover.

"You must help me get well," he would plead, "I have my family to take care of."

It was so hard, so hard at a time like this to talk about being resigned to the holy will of God, but Sister lost no opportunity of preparing her patient for the heaven that would soon open to him. While making him comfortable she would repeat over and over, "Not my will but Thine be done," until at last he too, began to say it. When that day came, Sister knew she had done more for him than merely give him a lease on his earthly life.

On the fourth day of her stay, Mr. Goffe surrendered with resignation the life he loved

but had learned to relinquish. As Sister Johana helped the undertaker place the yellow corpse on the stretcher, she steadied herself against the wide bedpost. Her head went reeling, a violent nausea enveloped her as she became now hot and cold in turn.

"Dear God, I can't quit yet. There are still the two little ones in the next room. I know they are getting better but I can't leave them."

And then she remembered. Now it was her turn to say it. Fervently kissing the crucifix which hung about her neck she whispered, "Thy will be done."

Sister Petronilla came that morning to take Sister Johana to the convent where the sisters were staying, as there were no adequate accommodations for her at the hotel.

"You must go to bed at once," Sister Petronilla cautioned as she assisted her up the stairs.

"But if I am some better in the morning perhaps I can return to the Goffe children," the young nun smilingly returned, pulling the covers over her shivering body.

In her delirium she too, like several other sisters sang "Mary, Dearest Mother Mary." This is not surprising, for after all they were

Mary's special children, having assumed the title "Sisters of Saint Mary." Mary was uppermost in their thoughts and can we doubt that they were foremost in hers?

"Send greetings to dear Reverend Mother for me and tell her I will pray for her at the throne of God." The hoarse whisper was hardly audible.

"You must not try to talk until you are a little stronger," Sister Petronilla warned, placing a cool cloth on the feverish brow.

"Tell all the sisters that I beg their pardon in case I have hurt anyone," the dying nun continued gasping for breath.

"Oh father, I'm so glad you're here," Sister Josepha greeted. And then under her breath, "I thought you wouldn't make it. She is sinking fast."

With Sisters Josepha and Petronilla, one on either side of the bed holding a lighted candle, Father began the general absolution. He had just finished administering the sacrament of Extreme Unction and was praying, "Depart out of this world, O Christian soul. . . ." when the lamp of her love being at its brightest, fed by the flame of intense suffering, the divine Spouse took her by the hand and led her along the bridal path to

the mansion He had prepared for her. It was September 17, the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi.



"THE SISTERS' CIRCLE"
MT. CALVARY CEMETERY - MEMPHIS, TENN.

Smallpox — 1883

"Arise, Make Haste and Come!"

All the sisters who went south to nurse the yellow fever victims had volunteered for this work, but the sisters caring for the patients at home in St. Louis, had no choice as to which families they were sent.

Sister Michael had such a horror of small-pox that the very mention of it made her shudder. And yet she knew that one day, it would catch up with her. That was inevitable! But this bright morning of March 18 as she hurried to her convent home, her thoughts were far from the loathsome disease. Uppermost in her mind was the celebration in honor of St. Joseph scheduled for that evening. And she would be there to share in the festivities. How wonderful! Now and then, her thoughts reverted to the previous night. Resolutely, she tried to dismiss the ghastly sight of six year old Tommy, literally choking to death as the final stage of diphtheria brought him lasting rest in the arms of his heavenly Father.

"Oh, Mother," she greeted coming into the kitchen. "I'm so glad to be back home; but little Tommy. . . ."

"Yes, one could have expected that," Mother replied studying Sister intently. How tired



"DEAR GOD! I COULDN'T DO THIS
ALONE - BUT TOGETHER -
YOU AND I . . ."

ILLUSTRATIONS by a
SISTER OF ST. MARY - 1960

she looks, poor dear . . . but I have no one else. I must ask her. . . .

"Sister, after you rest and eat your lunch, could you go to the Boron family? A neighbor called this morning asking for help. Everyone of them — mother, father and three children are down with the smallpox."

Smallpox! Sister drew in her breath sharply. It had come at last! Trembling all over now, Sister bravely replied, "Yes, Mother, I'll go after lunch."

"Dear God!" the young sister whispered as she made her way down the alley to the squalid shack of the Borons. "Dear God, I'm scared to death. Hold my hand. I couldn't do this alone, but together, You and I, we can manage."

Strange, how courageous she felt on entering the stricken home. The nauseous sight of these five victims, covered with running pustules, raving and moaning in delirium, the convulsions of the children, all would have tried a veteran nurse. But Sister Michael, although she retched involuntarily now and then, for the diagnostic odor of the disease filled the two stuffy rooms, worked tirelessly day and night. She seemed to have forgotten herself entirely. It was so rewarding to see

the progress of her patients. The little ones were asking for food, certainly prognostic of recovery and the mother was definitely improved. As for the father . . . "Well, I just can't be sure," Sister said to herself as, bending over the cot, she washed the pus from Jeannie's eyes.

"Oh, dear, my back!"

"What did you say, Sister?" Jeannie asked, her weak smile revealing a row of badly decayed teeth.

"Nothing, honey, just talking to myself, I guess."

As the hours dragged on, the backache became more severe and in the morning, when her forehead was covered with a red macular rash and she began to vomit, one of the neighbors notified Mother that Sister Michael was ill. Immediately she was brought home and an isolation unit set up. There were two long, painful weeks ahead. She went through all the stages of the disease; macular, vesicle and pustular stages. Her face became swollen beyond recognition and through it all the heroic nun prayed; "Together, we can make it; I can even get well again, that is, if You wish it so."

But He did not wish it. On April 16, when

all the world was budding forth to new life, she heard His gentle whisper, "Arise, make haste, My love, My beautiful one and come: for the winter is now past; the rain is over and gone and the flowers have appeared in our land." And she obeyed! She arose above her fears, above the inhibitions of nature; she arose once more to take His hand but this time, not to tread with Him into the regions of pain and sorrow but to run along the luminous path into the land of His joy and peace.

Can You Match Their Love?

Can you match the love of these heroines of Christ? Are you matching their love in your everyday life whether you be student, housewife, or head of family? Are you giving your whole self to the work which Providence has assigned to you and this just for love of Him? If you can sincerely answer these questions in the affirmative then you too, are a martyr of charity in a greater or less degree.

If you are a priest or nun living your consecrated life in perfect accord with your vows and the rules of your state of life, then

certainly you can and you do match their love.

For Young Ladies Only

Have you ever dreamed of being the bride of a king, of being fabulously rich? Have you ever pictured yourself as a contestant along with thousands of others and being chosen among them all to receive the prize? Have you ever longed to do something breathtakingly heroic and to have your heroism proclaimed to the ends of the earth? You have? Then listen! Do you hear anything? Do you hear a soft voice (scarcely a whisper) especially after Holy Communion or, strange to say, sometimes even on the dance floor? Listen again! It is saying, "Come, follow Me. Only I can fulfill all your desires. Only I, the King of Kings can make you fabulously wealthy with true riches. I am calling you from among thousands to a life of consecration and I promise you countless opportunities for heroism which shall not only be proclaimed to the ends of the earth but one day before the very courts of heaven."

Are you generous enough to heed Him? Are you brave enough? Can you accept the

challenge? Can you match the love of our sister-martyrs? If you can, then write for further information about the life and various activities of the Sisters of Saint Mary. Address your letter to:

Reverend Mother
Sisters of St. Mary
1100 Bellevue Ave.
St. Louis, 17, Missouri.



We sing of living martyrs
Who pick up cross each day
And walk with steady, gallant steps
The bloody, higher way.

We sing of kindred souls
Of virgins chosen, fair,
Who carry Christ to lowest haunts
Where angels would not dare.

We sing . . . but hush, what sounds are
these

That come from yonder skies?

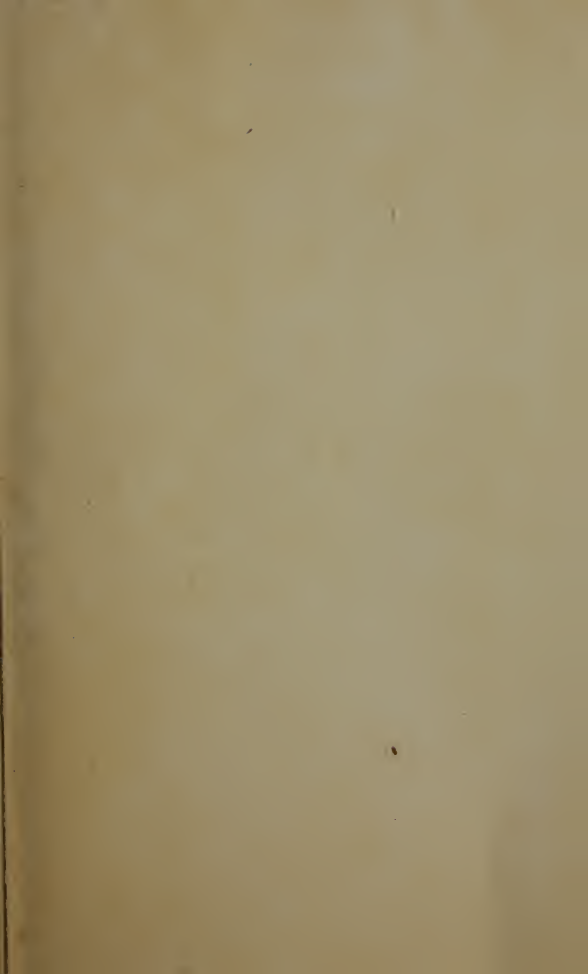
The heavenly choir caught up the strain
In happy, glad surprise.

They sing of waiting Spouse

His Heart with love aglow,

A welcome at the journey's end

As never bride did know!



IMPRIMATUR:

✠ Joseph E. Ritter
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Sisters of St. Mary
1100 Bellevue
St. Louis 17, Mo.

